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STATE FOR OES/ETC CHRISTINE DAWSON AND OES/PCI JONATHAN MARGOLIS;
WHITE HOUSE FOR OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ADVISER;
INTERIOR FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [TSPL](#) [KSCA](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRANCE SETS NEW BIODIVERSITY MECHANISM INITIATIVE
IN MOTION

REF: STATE 119273

[11](#). Summary. On June 28, France confirmed its desire to facilitate the launch of an international multi-stakeholder consultative process to assess the need for an "international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity" (IMOSEB). An informal meeting hosted by the GOF gave 40 participants an opportunity to express their (divided) views about the relevance of an IMOSEB and raise a number of questions related to the assessment process. Discussions at the end of the meeting -- definition of governance bodies for the consultative process, timeframe, budget considerations -- confirmed the determination of the GOF to set the initiative in motion without delay. End summary.

[12](#). Background information: A number of participants commended the French organizers of the International Conference on Biodiversity and Governance held in Paris in January 2005 for bringing together a range of visions on biodiversity challenges, for identifying research needs, and for enhancing public awareness. During that conference, President Chirac, recalling the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), proposed the creation of a similar type of mechanism for biodiversity. The conference final statement -- the manner of vetting of which had raised many questions -- called for the launch of an international, multi-stakeholder consultative process to assess the need for such a mechanism. The purpose of the Paris meeting, on June 28, was to initiate the "next steps" consultative process.

Participants

[13](#). Hosted by the French Research Ministry, the Paris June 28 workshop gathered 40-45 participants. One-fourth of the audience came from the French Research, Ecology, Foreign Affairs, Education, and Overseas Territories Ministries. Several members of the Scientific Committee in charge of the January Conference also attended, as well as representatives of CBD, UNEP, IUCN, FAO. The Canadian, Belgian, Brazilian, Italian, Danish, German, Mexican, Japanese, U.S., British, and Madagascan governments sent representatives either from capitals or local embassies and the European Commission sent two participants. Non-government organizations and the university sector were also represented (e.g. DIVERSITAS, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), Missouri Botanical Gardens, the Zoological Society of London, French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), and the Universities of Chile and Mexico and University of Stanford).

[14](#). At the start of the workshop, the group elected as its chairman Michel Loreau, ecology professor and head of the January 2005 Biodiversity Conference Scientific Committee. The second key person was Bob Watson, Chief Scientist at the World Bank, and author of the note on international scientific and technical assessments circulated prior to the workshop.

A divided audience

[15](#). Initial discussions revisited the question of the need for a new mechanism to address scientific information related to biodiversity. From the outset, and repeatedly, the U.S. representatives, Embassy Paris Acting Science Counselor and Scientific Affairs Specialist, presented clearly the negative views regarding the proposed mechanism and concerns of the U.S. government, as contained in reftel. A Brazilian government representative read an official statement, stressing the role and importance of CBD as a main international instrument and stating that the creation of a new mechanism could weaken the Convention, an outcome "not acceptable to Brazil." An EU Commission representative noted that the January Conference final statement (calling for a consultative process, para 2) was not a "consensus" statement.

16. The idea that a new mechanism would be redundant and even detrimental to the existing Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) found some resonance among the audience. A number of participants acknowledged the insufficient CBD coordination of scientific expertise and the need for improvement, but also argued that interested members of the world community should work on improving the Convention, instead of developing new overlapping mechanisms which might dilute investment and expertise.

17. Other participants opined that biodiversity issues are not prominent enough and that the establishment of a new mechanism would put biodiversity at the forefront. They also highlighted the need for "external independent scientific expertise" (i.e. outside the CBD), stating that the real issue is not "whether SBSTTA can or cannot do the job" but whether one should separate evaluation from management. According to these participants, a new mechanism would "strengthen, not weaken," and "complement, not challenge" the CBD.

18. Chairman Loreau concluded the first part of the discussion by noting a "consensus" on the part of the audience that the system (of scientific evaluation) is not working sufficiently well. He acknowledged the divided views of the audience concerning the necessity for a new mechanism and the type of structure needed, and underscored that the purpose of the consultation process initiated by France is "to explore the options and assess the need for a new mechanism."

Scope of the assessment process

19. The second part of the "brainstorming" discussion focused on the assessment process and proposed modalities for stakeholder consultations. At this point, many questions concerned the scope of the assessment, i.e. whether it should emphasize biodiversity or encompass both biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services; and whether it should provide the scientific and technical basis for CBD only or for all ecosystem-related conventions (CCD, Ramsar, CITES, and CMS). Participants expressed concern about the time needed to carry out "genuine" consultations prior to finalizing the recommendations. They also discussed relationships between the proposed assessment and existing initiatives (notably the Millennium Assessment).

110. The general conclusion to the second part of the one day session was that the scope of the assessment process should be "broad" and that the consultation process should be given sufficient time and focus on identifying the key functions which need to be strengthened.

Launching of the process: logistics

11. Governance bodies: The participants and the organizers eventually agreed on the following:

-- Composition of the International Steering Committee (ISC): the group should be expanded to include up to 80 participants gathering scientific and institutional expertise, taking into account geographical representation and a "balanced participation" of the types of actors on biodiversity. The following three groups were established from within the ranks of the International Steering Committee:

-- a small executive bureau: seven interim members, including Chilean Mary de Arroyo, and French Chairman Michel Loreau, were appointed, to be reconfirmed by the Chairman of the ISC, once elected. This executive bureau will make proposals to the ISC about new members.

-- a working group (5-6 participants) within the ISC to draft a "concept paper" to reformulate the terms of reference for the study and "stimulate the debate."

-- an Executive Secretariat (two staff) to monitor the consultative process. The ES will be located in the premises of French NGO, Diversitas Paris. Pending final approval for a two-year funding commitment from the GOF and in the absence of other proposals, the Executive Secretariat is likely to be headed by Diversitas Executive

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Director Anne Larigauderie.

112. Study timeframe and location of meetings: The ISC is planning to develop a preliminary report for presentation during the next Conference of the Parties of the CBD in March 2006, and a final report by May 2006. Four meetings have been scheduled for consultations, development of the options, and finalization of the study. The first meeting (June 28) and third meeting (December 2005) are hosted and

funded by the GOF. The location and funding for the other two meetings (October 2005, March 2006) remain to be determined.

¶13. Budget/Fund raising. Estimated costs for the study approximate 420,000 Euros. France has announced it will host two ISC meetings (out of four) and will also "contribute" to the expenses of the Executive Secretariat. Chairman Loreau made an appeal for other contributions, but received no immediate offers.

¶14. Next steps and pending issues:
-- Drafting of a concept paper (para 11) and new terms of reference. This document should be ready within 2-3 weeks for review by the ISC.
-- Finalizing the composition of the ISC (up to 80 members?)
-- Designation of ISC chairman (to be elected by the ISC)
-- Budget and fundraising
-- Location of second and fourth meeting (one in Asia?).

¶15. Comment: The Paris workshop confirmed the determination (steamrolling) of the GOF to create a new international biodiversity mechanism for scientific assessments despite calls, like that presented by the U.S., that such a mechanism is not needed and would serve to disrupt existing arrangements in existing biodiversity agreements and treaties. Whether the Elysee-driven initiative will gain momentum and obtain international recognition and participation remains to be seen. Answers to French appeals for financial and logistical commitments will soon clarify the resonance and ownership of the French initiative. Other pending issues include the size and composition of the ISC, which may evolve in the near future. This will determine whether it will remain both manageable and legitimate as a representative body. Embassy representatives requested to remain associated with the Steering Committee in order to be in a position to monitor developments.

Stapleton